

Statement before the House Foreign Affairs Committee,

***“THE UNITED NATIONS: URGENT PROBLEMS
THAT NEED CONGRESSIONAL ACTION”***

A Statement by

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Madame Chairman, Ranking Member Berman, distinguished members of the Committee: I am honored to have been invited to appear before you today on the timely and important topic of U.S. support for the United Nations.

Before taking up my current position, I served for 12 years with the UN in various capacities at Headquarters in New York and in the field. As a result of that service I am well aware of the Organization's strengths and weaknesses as well as of its vital role in the world.

We are at a point of bewildering global transition. From natural disasters to conflict in fragile countries, we are presented with multidimensional transnational challenges beyond the ability of any single government, even one as powerful as the U.S., to address. The spillover from these challenges can include wider conflict, health crises, economic dislocation, transnational crime, and terrorism. Even though the UN, of course, cannot address all the world's ills, this is a time for the U.S. to engage fully with the UN through a smart multilateral approach to meet these transnational problems.

I believe that it is essential for the U.S. to remain fully engaged in the UN to benefit from and make use of its strengths and strongly committed to and supportive of its reform to correct its weaknesses. The U.S. played the central role in creating the UN and gave it life by animating it with American ideals and values. Those values have now become a powerful set of international norms of human rights and democratic governance. All states do not live up to them, but all have to answer for falling short.

UN contributions to the global good

The UN makes real contributions to the global good on a daily basis. From floods in Pakistan to the earthquake in Haiti to Sudan and Afghanistan, the UN is often the first responder in times of natural or man-made disaster. The World Food Programme has 90 million beneficiaries in 73 countries, feeding those who otherwise would not eat. The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees cares for 34 million people forcibly displaced. UNICEF provides child immunizations and vaccinations to more than half of the world's children. UN Peace operations have brought about the end of armed conflicts and helped to establish stability through missions in such places as Angola, Burundi, El Salvador, Guatemala, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Namibia, and Nepal.

U.S. Interests are achieved through the UN

The U.S. has many tools at its disposal to achieve its policy objectives and advance national interest. Multilateral diplomacy is one of those tools, and the United Nations is the central forum for its exercise. U.S. interests are advanced by participation in the UN. Peacekeeping has often been referred to as a "force multiplier" for the U.S., but I believe that in

a broader sense, the UN is an “influence multiplier” for the U.S. as well. It plays this role in three ways.

First, the UN operates in places where the U.S. might have concerns but not fundamental interests. It tackles difficult but essential tasks that the U.S. and other major powers would not want to take on alone. Examples include Sudan, where the UN helped to keep the peace and played a central role in the recent successful referendum; East Timor, which the UN shepherded to independence; and Nepal, where a UN mission helped end a decades-long civil war and usher in a democratic future.

The direct benefits of these activities for the U.S. include burden and cost sharing. Peacekeeping allows US interests to be addressed without requiring U.S. troops to be deployed to places where the UN has missions. Further, given that peacekeeping accounts for less than one percent of global military spending, it is an extremely cost effective activity. In another example of burden sharing, the World Food Programme is currently feeding some one third of the people of Afghanistan, a job that would likely fall to the U.S. in the absence of the UN.

Second, the UN talks to people and parties the U.S. will not or cannot talk to. In Sudan, for example, along with the African Union, the UN has directly applied pressure on the regime in Khartoum to allow the referendum to go forward. The Security Council’s referral of the actions of Sudanese leaders regarding Darfur to the International Criminal Court led to the subsequent indictments of President Bashir and other senior officials and likely had the effect of increasing the Sudanese government’s cooperation in the referendum.

Third, the UN’s legitimacy and credibility, and the trust with which it is viewed in much of the world enables it to carry out tasks other entities, especially governments acting alone, are not able to do. A prime example of this was the subject of my last job at the UN: the Commission of Inquiry into the facts and circumstances of the assassination of former Pakistani Prime Minister Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. Because of the UN’s widely perceived impartiality, the Pakistani government asked the UN to undertake an inquiry into the assassination, and the U.S. supported this step toward ending impunity.

The work of the UN is fundamental to US interests because of the number of transnational problems that defy unilateral or bilateral solutions. The UN has made significant contributions on such challenges as terrorism, climate change, transnational crime, food security, failing states, the spread of infectious disease, and poverty eradication. There is no alternative to multilateralism to address these issues effectively.

U.S. leadership and engagement are essential

The U.S. remains the most influential member of the UN; it does more to set the agenda of the Organization than any other member. However, because of the nature of multilateral diplomacy, no one member always gets everything it wants. But, if one were to poll other

member states on which member they believe has the greatest amount of influence in the UN, the U.S. would likely be the unanimous choice.

Examples of the U.S. being out-voted in the UN come largely from the General Assembly, where the principle of one-member-one-vote pertains, and compromise and negotiation are necessary to be effective. Members of this Committee would recognize the legislative nature of multilateral diplomacy. Nevertheless, it is important to note that General Assembly resolutions are not binding on member states.

For a variety of reasons, the General Assembly has become less powerful in comparison to the Security Council, which has in recent years become the most influential organ of the UN. The U.S. has a significant and powerful voice in the Security Council, in part because of its status as a permanent member with a veto, and in part because of the initiative that America traditionally takes in the Council.

For example, the last two years of the Bush Administration was among the most active and productive periods for the Security Council and resulted in ground-breaking resolutions. In 2007, the Security Council approved the largest number of peacekeepers in the history of the Organization. Today, some 120,000 peacekeepers serve around the world. That same year, the innovative hybrid UN-African Union mission for Darfur was established.

An emblematic earlier example of U.S. leadership is the skillful diplomacy deployed by the administration of George H.W. Bush in response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. President Bush's Ambassador to the UN, Thomas Pickering, guided ten resolutions through the Security Council with clear majorities condemning the invasion, demanding immediate Iraqi withdrawal, imposing economic sanctions against the Iraqi government, and supporting the use of force to push Iraq out of Kuwait.

A more recent example of such leadership in the Council was the Obama administration's successful effort to place sanctions on Iran to encourage cooperation with the international community over its development of nuclear capability. In addition, the U.S. has led the recent successful efforts to establish the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict and the new agency, UN Women, which elevates and consolidates a number of gender components to mainstream women's concerns throughout the UN system.

U.S. leadership and influence in the UN results in part from the role the U.S. has traditionally played in the UN and in part from its status as the largest contributor to the Organization. We must not return to the days of withholding funds as some have suggested. The U.S. must meet its obligations, including funding for peacekeeping, to provide the Organization with the resources necessary to operate effectively. Withholding funds hurts the UN; but, more than that, it doesn't advance U.S. interests. Inadequate funding hampers important work in areas such as peace operations that are not funded by the peacekeeping budget, humanitarian activities,

and other fundamentally important tasks. It creates an atmosphere of contention which impedes the U.S.'s ability to lead. It results in less willingness to support U.S. initiatives, and, if coupled with grudging participation and boycotting of forums by the U.S., would lead to a lessening of our influence in the Organization.

This does not mean that the U.S. should not take a close look at management and budget issues. Fiscal discipline is essential for the UN. Congress and the Executive branch must ensure that America's contributions, which are substantial, are used effectively, efficiently, and for purposes intended and approved. But, the timely and full payment of assessments is fundamental. Adequate funding strengthens the UN and increases U.S. effectiveness and credibility in its dealings with other member states. The U.S. has a unique and powerful role to play in overseeing this that cannot be met fully if it is unwilling to take a seat at the table.

It is necessary for the U.S. to be actively engaged to exercise its influence fully. The Human Rights Council is good example of this. There should be no doubt that the Human Rights Council needs reform. Reasonable people can disagree about whether the U.S. should engage or stay out. However, I support the U.S. decision to join the Council, and U.S. leadership on UN human rights initiatives across administrations – both Republican and Democratic. Only by being at the table can the U.S. bring about the changes necessary to assist this important body to evolve into a more credible vehicle to protect and promote human rights around the world.

Since assuming a seat on the Council in 2009, the U.S. has brought about positive change in the work of the Council. Examples include the recent Special Session on events in Cote d'Ivoire, the establishment of a Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Assembly and Association, and the creation of a Working Group of independent experts to prevent discrimination against women.

UN Reform

The UN must work to be effective, and to enhance areas that require improvement. Reform is clearly necessary, and it is a bipartisan issue. The 2005 United States Institute of Peace Gingrich-Mitchell Task Force on UN Reform identified key areas in which the UN must improve, including establishing an independent audit function, ethics and disclosure policies for senior officials, and mandate review. Some of the Task Force recommendations have been implemented, at least in part. Others have not. Much work remains to be done.

As with most large and complex organizations, there is a constant need for vigilance and oversight to ensure that it spends funds efficiently and effectively, and successfully fulfills its mandated tasks. This is complicated by the fact that the UN and its agencies more often than not work in some of the most difficult and dangerous places in the world. In no way does this excuse the poor management of funds or ineffective management and oversight. But it does point to the unique challenges that face the Organization as it strives to improve its way of working.

The U.S. has always played a leading role in bringing about needed reform of the United Nations.

Reform of the Security Council is an important aspect of the overall reform package. For the Security Council to retain its legitimacy, effectiveness, and primacy as the organ charged with the maintenance of international peace and security, it is important for permanent membership to be expanded to reflect the changing global power landscape. President Obama has pledged to support India's candidacy for a new permanent seat on the Council. Though mindful that the expansion of the permanent membership could make the body more unwieldy by dint of its increased size, the cost of not reforming the Council could be a gradual weakening of the body's legitimacy and credibility.

We must find a way to incorporate the emerging powers in leadership roles in the formal global architecture because they have already begun to exercise their growing influence informally.

Multilateral diplomacy is hard

The real and concrete contributions made by the UN to the lives of people around the world do not mean that the Organization is without shortcomings. One of the most difficult aspects of working with the UN as a staff member or a representative of a member state, or as a lawmaker or a citizen of a country watching it is the slow pace of multilateral diplomacy. We all know that the UN often frustrates Americans, and the people of most other countries, even as they express their support for the Organization. They are not alone in being frustrated.

But despite the frustrations, opinion polls show substantial support among Americans for the UN. Polls recently conducted by Mr. Yeo's organization, the UN Foundation, show a significant majority of Americans, 59 percent, have a favorable impression of the Organization, and that clear majorities in all parties identify the United Nations as relevant: 85 percent of Democrats, 57 percent of independents, and 55 percent of Republicans. This is not a partisan issue.

Yet, no one is fully satisfied with multilateralism. It is hard and we use it to tackle the toughest issues of the global commons most of which touch on fundamental national interests. It requires bargaining, negotiation and compromise, and in that way is not unlike the legislative process we see in this venerable institution. While most of us are dissatisfied, there is no effective alternative method of dealing with transnational problems that do not respect borders and have the potential of significantly affecting our lives.

Multilateral diplomacy is still in its infancy. We have had hundreds of years of experience of bilateral relations between nation-states, but only 64 years of broad experience with multilateralism. We, all states, need to work together to improve the operations of

multilateral organizations, especially the UN. There is no choice, given the problems that face us, but to work to make our cooperative bodies better serve global needs.

Conclusion

Madame Chairman, Ranking Member Berman, distinguished members of the Committee, as I stated at the outset, I served with the UN for 12 years. I served because of the Organization's ideals, and I am proud that they were profoundly shaped and influenced by American ideals. I have had friends and close colleagues at the UN die in the line of duty in furtherance of the aims of the United Nations Charter, working for the global good. I honor them for their service and am honored by my time in service. I believe in the United Nations. And want us to work together to help the UN live up to its ideals.